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**Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address**

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| The speech was primarily addressed to the people of the South, and was intended to succinctly state Lincoln's intended policies and desires toward that section, where seven states had seceded from the Union and formed the [Confederate States of America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_States_of_America). |  |

Written in a spirit of reconciliation toward the rebellious states, Lincoln's inaugural address touched on several topics:

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| first, his pledge to "hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government"—including [Fort Sumter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Sumter), which was still in Federal hands; |  |
| second, his argument that the Union was undissolvable, and thus that secession was impossible; |  |
| and third, a promise that while he would never be the first to attack, any use of arms against the United States would be regarded as rebellion, and met with force. |  |

The inauguration took place on the eve of the [American Civil War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War), which began soon after with the Confederate attack on [Fort Sumter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Sumter).

Desperately wishing to avoid this terrible conflict, Lincoln closed the address with this impassioned plea:

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| " I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.” |  |

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| Lincoln was [chosen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860_Republican_National_Convention) to be the [Republican](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Republican_Party_(United_States)) candidate in the [1860 presidential election](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1860), which he won on November 6 with 180 electoral votes. Between this time and [his inauguration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_inauguration_of_Abraham_Lincoln) on March 4, seven Deep South cotton states—[South Carolina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Carolina), [Mississippi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mississippi), [Georgia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_(U.S._state)), [Florida](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida), [Alabama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alabama), [Louisiana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana) and [Texas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas)—would [secede](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_States_of_America) from the Union. The entire nation, together with several interested foreign powers, awaited the President-elect's words on what exactly his policy toward the new Confederacy would be. |  |

Lincoln composed his address using four basic references: [Henry Clay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Clay)'s 1850 speech on compromise, [Daniel Webster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Webster)'s [reply to Hayne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webster-Hayne_debate), [Andrew Jackson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Jackson)'s proclamation against [nullification](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nullification), and the [United States Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Constitution).

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| Lincoln opened his speech by first indicating that he would not touch on "those matters of administration about which there is no special anxiety or excitement." |  |
| The remainder of the speech would address the concerns of Southerners, who were apprehensive that "by the accession of a Republican Administration their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered." |  |
| Lincoln emphatically denied this assertion, and invited his listeners to consider his past speeches on the subject of slavery, together with the platform adopted by the Republican Party, which explicitly guaranteed the right of each individual state to decide for itself on the subject of slavery, together with the right of each state to be free from coercion of any kind from other states, or the Federal government. |  |

He went on to address several other points of particular interest at the time:

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| 1. **Slavery**: Lincoln stated emphatically that he had "...no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." |  |
| 1. **Legal status of the South**: He asserted that as he had just taken an oath "to [preserve, protect, and defend the United States Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oath_of_office_of_the_President_of_the_United_States)", this oath enjoined him to see that the laws of the Union were faithfully executed in all states—including those that had seceded. |  |
| 1. **Use of force**: Lincoln promised that there would be no use of force against the South, unless it proved necessary for him to fulfill his obligation to "hold, occupy, and possess the property and places" belonging to the federal government, and to collect legal duties and imposts. However, if the South chose to actively take up arms against the Government, their insurrection would meet a firm and forceful response. |  |
| 1. **Secession**: Referring to words in the [preamble to the Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preamble_to_the_United_States_Constitution), Lincoln stated that the Constitution was established "to form a more perfect union" than the [Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Articles_of_Confederation) had effected. Since the Union established under the Articles was *explicitly* perpetual in name and text, thus the Union under the Constitution was equally perpetual. He added that even if the Constitution were to be construed as a simple contract, it could not be legally rescinded without an agreement between all parties, meaning *all* of the states, North and South. |  |
| 1. **Protection of slavery**: Lincoln explicitly stated that he had no objection to the proposed [Corwin amendment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corwin_amendment) to the Constitution, which had already been approved by both houses of the [United States Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Congress). This amendment would formally protect slavery in those states in which it already existed, and assure to each state the right to establish or repudiate it. Lincoln indicated that he thought that this right was already protected in the original Constitution, and thus that the Corwin amendment merely reiterated what it already contained. |  |
| 1. **Slavery in the Territories**: Lincoln asserted that nothing in the Constitution expressly said what either could or could not be done regarding slavery in the territories. He indicated his willingness to enforce the [Fugitive Slave Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fugitive_Slave_Act), so long as free blacks could be protected from being kidnapped and illegally sold into slavery through its misuse. |  |
| 1. **The postal service**: The [U.S. Mails](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Post_Office_Department) would continue to operate throughout the South, "unless repelled." |  |
| 1. **Federal offices in the South**: With no professional [civil service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_service) in operation during this period of American history, Lincoln promised that he would not use the [spoils system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spoils_system) to appoint Northern office-holders to federal offices, such as postmasterships, located in the Southern states. Instead, said he, he would "forego the use of such offices" rather than force "obnoxious strangers" upon the South. |  |
| Lincoln concluded his speech with an eloquent plea for calm and cool but, deliberation in the face of mounting tension throughout the nation. He assured the rebellious states that the Federal government would never initiate any conflict with them, and indicated his own conviction that once "touched" once more by "the better angels of our nature," the "mystic chords of memory" North and South would "yet swell the chorus of the Union." |  |